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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that career education should blend "vocational education," "general education," and "college preparatory education" into a new curricular design. Career education should not be thought of as "vocational technical education," nor should career education be looked upon unfavorably, as it sometimes is. Some of the problems of speech communication and career education are discussed. Robert Pirsig's novel "Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance" is examined in terms of career education and speech communication, and it is concluded that students and teachers must start taking advantage of the unlimited opportunity career education offers. (TS)

John Michael Muchmore

The Community College and Career Communication: An Unlimited Opportunity

The title of this paper suggests that there is enormous potential in the area of career education for the speech communication professional. I believe this, but my purpose in the following comments has grown out of concern and frustration rather than the sort of security and optimism suggested by the title.

My personal experience with career education is a relatively long one beginning in the middle sixties when I had the opportunity to join the comprehensive community college movement. At that time, I had my first real experience with what Marland and others have labeled "career education." I believe now, as I believed then, that career education must not be viewed simply as a retitling of "vocational education" or "general education," nor should it be considered as a parallel to "college preparatory education." Instead, it is to be viewed as a blending of the three into a new curricular design. In a 1972 article, Kathleen Galvin and I suggested that speech communication educators had a variety of options open to them. They could (1) work within the framework of existing speech communication courses, examine and focus upon communication as it relates to careers of all kinds; (2) develop communication courses attending specifically and exclusively to the needs of particular areas; (3) develop their own abilities in order

to better function as resource and consultative personnel in career programs, and (4) commit their energies and expertise to the development of instructional materials which might be utilized in career contexts.[1] At that time, we did not suggest which of these alternatives was the ideal one nor did we suggest that they were mutually exclusive.

During the ensuing four years, I have had the opportunity to visit a number of institutions, examine manuscript proposals, and talk with colleagues. I am left with the impression that a frequent course of action has been one which I personally view as undesirable, that is, to concentrate on the development of speech communication courses addressed specifically and exclusively to the needs of particular career areas. While it is excessive to suggest that the fate of the world hinges on this issue, I think that the result of this decision may well be to affirm the fear of Chicago columnist Sydney J. Harris who cautioned that the "emphasis on vocational training (is) turning out men who can do something exceptionally well, but don't really know what is most worth doing and what isn't."[2] To some degree, I share Mr. Harris' concern and the longer I watch, the more closely I find myself identifying with his fear.

In response to this concern, I should like to comment on a number of the issues that have arisen as obstacles to the realization of the opportunity that career education presents. Initially, despite Marland, Garner and others and the caution

that they advanced, I would contend that far too many people continue to feel that "career education" is a synonym for "vocational technical education" and that these people continue to apply an inappropriate definition to both the former and latter terms. They, and I shall have to leave the "they" unidentified because it tends to be an attitude rather than assertions by specific individuals, still feel that career education is an option for the individual who cannot function in a standard academic situation. I would be quick to grant that there are many who are involved in specific career programs because they would not, or at least feel they would not, succeed in a traditional baccalaureate setting. Conversely, there are many capable and highly intelligent individuals following such disparate career program paths as food services, dental hygiene, law enforcement and turf management. Equally important, do we not tend to forget that the medical student is preparing for a career in medicine?--that the law student is preparing for a career in the law?--that the majority of us prepared for a career in teaching? One of the most obvious aims of education has been to prepare individuals in such a manner that they could choose and thereafter make, the contribution to society that they deemed important. (I will only parenthetically introduce the contention that a more important purpose of education may have been, and may still be, to establish and maintain social status.) Certainly, the career an individual chooses to pursue, the work role he or she assumes

represents one of the most important contributions, either through omission or commision, that the individual makes.

Let us conclude that the identification of a career interest and that the acquisition and application of the abilities necessary to perform that career in the most effective manner possible are important to all of us. Let us recognize that even though a doctor and a sanitation worker perform vastly different functions each of those functions is important to social order and progress. Let us eliminate from our vocabulary, forever, comparative comments such as "even garbage men get paid more than that." Let us concede that a baker might be more intelligent than a doctor, that a policeman might be more a humanist than a minister -- not is or are but might be. Let us take our own advice about labeling and allness. And the next time someone prepares a text with a career communication emphasis, consider the fact that Eric Hoffer is a longshoreman and that there are others like him who cannot only read but can read with a precision that escapes many who are in loftier positions.

The responsibility for this cleavage does not belong to us alone. Let me also urge that the individuals who allege experience in the "real world" and drag out that tired and ridiculous cliche in an effort to somehow suggest that those who teach have managed to escape and know nothing of work be taken to task. We are all, with the exceptions of those who have had the misfortune to effect psychological escape, in the

real world. It is a world comprised of a multitude of varied experiences, each of which contributes in one way or another to our individual life quality. I am at once appalled and mystified by those in business settings who imply that the academician knows nothing of the "real world" and then behave in a manner that denies the existence of truth, quality, and honesty. I am confused by the "real world" of politics that is comprised of deceit, lies and threats -- a world that denies any ultimate accountability. I am distressed by the "real world" of business that repossesses the home of an illiterate widow and alleges that this is justice while simultaneously denying the tragic effect this has on the people involved and all of us are involved.

In short, we are all in the real world and everything that we do and experience is a part of that world whether it be work, school, play or rest.

Now we see a new problem. We are forced into competition -- not competition in an effort to furnish the student with the most appropriate, most important educational experience, but competition to survive, to generate courses and programs to justify existence. We see competition where there ought to be cooperation. This seems an especially critical issue in the case of career education. We must guard against the temptation to develop new course for specific career areas in order to gain thirty or sixty or ninety additional students.

What is the proper response to my frustration and concerns?

I do not pretend to have a complete prescription, but I am convinced of certain things. First, I am convinced that it is important to be able to communicate effectively. I further believe that the communicator bears a heavy responsibility -- that he or she is asking for a change on the part of the other party (ies) in the communicative relationship. The import of that change will vary dramatically from situation to situation but the moral, ethical and legal implications and obligations that are incumbent upon the individual who initiates the request remain the same. Certainly, these implications and obligations are as important in one's career commitments as they are in one's recreative and social contacts. The nurse, the police officer, the teacher, the doctor -- all are faced with enormous questions that require communication judgements beyond the matter of strategy. We have a role to play in preparing people to make these judgements. We have a responsibility to make people aware of the real impact of communication activities.

I am equally convinced that Toffler is correct when he indicates that it is critical that "all students should be grounded in certain common skills needed for human communication and social integration."[3] He further contends that these skills will fall into three critical areas: learning, relating and choosing.[4] While Mr. Toffler will take only slight pleasure (and at that I am flattering myself) with my agreeing with him, I believe that it is extremely important to emphasize again

his central thesis that the future is coming upon us at a rate that defies past comparison -- that to be trained today may be to be incompetent tomorrow. The critical abilities are the ones that have pervaded Western education for centuries. One must be able to learn. Despite periodic philosophical disputes, these are the issues to which rhetoricians have addressed themselves for centuries. The essential character of these abilities has not changed nor does it change when one views them in their relationship with medicine as opposed to their relationship with food preparation. The specifics change -- the nature of the context, the vocabularly, the degree of criticalness attending the situation change, but the larger abilities are the same.

By this time, many and perhaps most of you have read Robert Pirsig's beautiful book Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance. If you haven't, do. The work addresses itself to the issue presented in the title of this paper. It might well have been subtitled "Career Education and Speech-Communication: An Unlimited Opportunity." (Admittedly, this would have compounded the problem generated by the already exotic title of the book.) With apologies to those of you who have read the work, let me offer a brief summary of my perceptions. A part of Pirsig's approach is to employ the motorcycle and the relationship of a man to his motorcycle to demonstrate that the relationship can be one of quality or one of perfunctoriness. Pirsig's motorcycle is career education -- a vehicle, not an end. We can have the

expensive touring motorcycle of his early partners on the journey but if we do not recognize the need to relate to the machine, we have all gloss and no quality. The same principle can be applied to our career commitment. If we are not careful, we have all gloss and no quality. We have the realtor who is unable to distinguish between sale/commission and the valuable matching and selecting service he or she is capable of providing; the policeman who has a sharpshooter rating but is unable to exercise discretion; the nurse who has an exceptional knowledge of medicine but is insensitive to patient fear and concern.

I do not feel adequate to make judgements about the overall accuracy of the philosophical observations Pirsig offers, but his analysis of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and the Sophists is a fascinating one -- most fascinating because of his conclusion that "Quality! Virtue! Dharma! That is what the Sophists were teaching! Not ethical relativism. Not pristine virtue! But arete. Excellence."[5] Excellence is a product of communication.

The opportunity that we have not yet responded to in any but beginning terms is that of working to find the elements of excellence that become a part of career experiences. We must investigate, observe, study, learn where the conflicts reside -- where values become issues in this portion of the individual's life -- where communication skills and sensitivities will be critical to the individual's career success --

and I use success with respect to more than wealth and external adulation. Toffler knows that we must change -- that the industrial age is no longer with us but that "our schools will continue to turn out industrial men until we teach young people the skills necessary to identify and clarify, if not reconcile, conflicts in their own value systems."[6]

As Harris contends, "What we need most of all are not people who can do things effectively; but people who know what is proper to do and what is improper, who have been schooled to discern the better from the worse, and thus are able to make a free choice for the better."[7] To become a partner in this effort is the unlimited opportunity that career education presents us.

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Notes and Sources

[1]Kathleen Galvin and John Muchmore, "Career Education: A Challenge" Central States Speech Journal, XXIII (Spring, 1972), 61-63.

[2]Sydney J. Harris, "Occupational Training Not Education," Chicago Daily News (March 10, 1973), 8.

[3]Alvin Toffler, Future Shock (New York: Random House, 1970), 366.

[4]Ibid., 367.

[5]Robert Pirsig, Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance (New York: Bantam Books, 1975), 371.

[6]Toffler, 370.

[7]Harris, 8.